

Verdi union uses questionable vote to push through cuts in real wages for postal workers in Germany

Postal Action Committee

3 April 2023

Dear colleagues,

With yesterday's announcement of the results of the second ballot, Verdi has pushed through the real wage cuts that Deutsche Post had demanded.

A Verdi press release states that "61.7 percent of those polled" voted in favour of accepting the collective bargaining results. This is highly implausible. Everyone here knows how widespread the level of rejection was. In the Postal Action Committee, a colleague reported that at his delivery hub, all staff, including the shop stewards and even the full-time *Betriebsrat* (works council) representative, voted in favour of rejection and to strike.

Other hubs reported that no vote had been held at their workplace and no one from the organization arranging the ballot had even been. What is certain is that the second ballot, unlike the first, was very poorly organized.

In answer to an inquiry regarding turnout, a press spokesperson for Verdi's federal executive committee said no information was available about this. Other press inquiries about this were not answered. How can that be? The turnout percentage can easily be calculated.

The question of voting participation is crucial. If one assumes that only about 50 percent of those eligible voted, a completely different picture emerges. It would mean about 31,000 postal workers would have voted in favour of the offer, which is about 30 percent of Verdi members and not even 20 percent of all 160,000 postal workers.

Given that the Verdi executive and negotiating commission, which are headed by highly paid union functionaries, overrode the clear strike decision of the

first ballot and prevented a strike, the result of the second ballot must be verified.

As an action committee, we demand that all the details of the vote be disclosed. Who were the members of the committee that organized the vote? Who was in charge of this committee? When was the vote held and where? What was the level of participation? We call on all postal workers who can provide important details about the voting process to contact the Action Committee. We want to see if we can challenge the vote.

The fact that the union bargaining committee did not spare a second before it quickly accepted the employer's offer and declared negotiations over is not surprising. It is part of the union apparatus and its malicious manoeuvrings.

The entire second ballot was one big fraud. We had already rejected the first offer from Deutsche Post and voted by 86 percent to strike. Verdi overrode this membership vote and, together with management, repackaged the same offer and presented it again for acceptance.

It then tried to cover this up with distortions, half-truths and lies about the second offer. The claim that the second offer was 25 percent better than the first was and is a bold-faced lie. Like Deutsche Post, Verdi simply includes the tax-free one-off payment in the wage increases. But this is not a wage increase, it is a one-time payment to push through a pay freeze this year.

Verdi says the increase of €340 a month on basic pay corresponds to "an increase of 16.1 to 11 percent in the lower three pay groups, in which almost 90 percent of employees are classified." They forget to mention that

they agreed to a contract lasting 24 months. Calculated over one year, that would be 5.5 percent to 8 percent! We had originally asked for 15 percent! Moreover, this increase will not come until May next year, when inflation will have eaten up even larger portions of our real wages.

So, although in both offers the amount of the one-off inflation compensation, the pay freeze for 2023 and an increase on basic rates of €340 remained the same, the Verdi leadership tried to lure those who are at their wits' end due to the price increases and have accumulated debts with the one-off payment of €1,020 in April. But the money was then cut accordingly in the following months because the amount of the one-off payment remained exactly the same.

Verdi wanted to achieve two things: First, to continue the reduction in real wages that has been going on for years, and second, to prevent a strike.

The union had already prepared this in the fall of last year. The Concerted Action, to which Chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democrat) invited business and union representatives, including Verdi head Frank Werneke, had discussed how to raise billions for military rearmament as well as to ensure the record profits of corporations in times of inflation. They all agreed that wages must not rise as a result.

The government, big business and the unions then agreed on the €3,000 tax-free inflation compensation payments for precisely this purpose. In this way, unions and employers were able to gloss over wage agreements that were below the rate of inflation and push through real wage reductions.

This is how it happened in the auto, steel, and chemical industries, and now here with us, and tomorrow it is to be repeated in the public sector. There, Verdi is accepting arbitration in order to block a strike ballot. Verdi is trying to stifle the willingness of the 2.5 million public sector workers to fight and push through cuts in real wages in the interests of the state—the federal government and local authorities.

“The collective bargaining round is over,” cheered the Verdi leadership around chief negotiator Andrea Kocsis on Friday. Verdi declares our struggle over, but it has only just begun. The fact that in this contract dispute the close collaboration and downright conspiracy of government, corporations and union against us became so clearly visible only shows how

important our work as an action committee is. We are building the countermovement by linking up with our colleagues in the public sector, and also in the industrial plants. And not just in Germany, but internationally.

We are in close contact with workers who are in struggle in France and the UK. At our first online meeting last week, a speaker from Paris reported on the strikes and street battles in France. There, President Emanuel Macron is trampling on democracy and overriding popular opposition. And, just as the German government is leaning on the unions, the French unions too are trying to negotiate with the “president of the rich” to stop the growing mobilization.

At the same online meeting, a colleague from England reported on the struggle of postal workers in the UK. There, our fellow postal workers are rebelling against an agreement reached by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) with Royal Mail, where the union has also ignored two strike votes.

But the workers are stronger than the apparatuses. There is a powerful international movement growing that can oppose the wage cuts being made in the interests of the rich and to fund militarism. We must therefore build up our work as an action committee and network internationally. If we are to represent our interests effectively, we must build independent action committees in all postal hubs, distribution centres and offices to break the control of the Verdi apparatus.



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